



## Resistance & Renewal's Advent Challenge 2014

[www.resistanceandrenewal.net](http://www.resistanceandrenewal.net)

Christmas is so easily overtaken by busyness, spending and anxiety. These daily reflections will help you to take some time out each day leading up to Christmas to reflect on the person at the heart of the whole celebration. They are grouped in pairs; the ones on the left in blue focus on the destructive values to resist, and the ones on the right in green are those values which bring renewal to us and the world around us. Each day involves 4 steps: a time of silence, a Bible reading, a few sentences to aid reflection and some ideas for prayer. We hope it helps you grab a little bit of R&R this Advent.

<b>Day 1: Fear</b> Monday 1st December		<b>Day 2: Faith</b> Tuesday 2nd December	
<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute	<b>Read:</b> John 14.27	<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute	<b>Read:</b> Luke 21.1-4
<b>Reflect:</b> Fear so often holds us back from being who we could be. Jesus' most common command to his followers is not to be afraid and not to fear. Our fears and worries tell us lies and they breed insecurity and an inward focus. This turns neighbours into strangers and the person in need into a threat. Our fears reduce what we can do for God.		<b>Reflect:</b> It is only when we put our beliefs into action that they become faith. In the economy of God's kingdom this widow's offering was huge because she was truly relying on God. This is the kind of risky faith that God wants, a faith that goes beyond words and puts its money where its mouth is.	
<b>Pray:</b> For someone you are fearful of, that you may resist worry and anxiety in your relationship with them		<b>Pray:</b> For an area of your life where you feel you act more boldly and step out in faith and confidence.	
<b>Day 3: Hatred</b> Wednesday 3rd December		<b>Day 4: Hope</b> Thursday 4th December	
<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute	<b>Read:</b> Matthew 2.1-18	<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute	<b>Read:</b> Luke 2.8-20
<b>Reflect:</b> King Herod embodies the hatred which burns in corrupt leaders when their power is threatened. When he was outwitted by the Magi, his fury leads to him to lash out barbarically, and ineffectively, to counter the threat to his power. His actions stand as an example of the inhumane horror of hatred and violence.		<b>Reflect:</b> Hope is at the heart of the Christmas story. A humble bunch of shepherds were the first to hear this "good news of great joy", which transformed them into the first evangelists, sharing the news with others. We can be renewed by this same hope too as we read, reflect and pray on Jesus' life and commit to follow Him afresh.	
<b>Pray:</b> For those suffering in places in the world afflicted by the hatred and violence of corrupt leaders.		<b>Pray:</b> That your hope will be renewed this Advent and this will be evident to those around.	
<b>Day 5: Selfishness</b> Friday 5th December		<b>Day 6: Simplicity</b> Saturday 6th December	
<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute	<b>Read:</b> Luke 20.45-47	<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute	<b>Read:</b> Luke 12.22-31
<b>Reflect:</b> The teachers of the law loved status, wealth and power. It was structured selfishness which took money from the poor through respectable religion. Jesus exposes the corrupt system in the most public way possible: in the temple itself. Like all prophets, He tells the truth to the powerful.		<b>Reflect:</b> What do you <i>really</i> need more of: books, clothes, technology, space, cash? Will any of these things truly deepen our experience of life? Yet how much time and energy do we spend chasing after them? Jesus teaches that simplicity can help us live more deeply and freely.	
<b>Pray:</b> To resist the selfishness which can infect our lives, focussing on ourselves rather than the needs of others		<b>Pray:</b> For how you can renew Christmas by making it a simpler and deeper celebration this year.	
<b>Day 7: Apathy</b> Sunday 7th December		<b>Day 8: Action</b> Monday 8th December	
<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute	<b>Read:</b> Matthew 21.28-32	<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute	<b>Read:</b> Luke 6.46-49
<b>Reflect:</b> Isn't it so much easier to say the right words than to do the right things? We can easily be quite apathetic about action. This parable sums up the call of real faith to have integrity between what we say with what we do.		<b>Reflect:</b> The difference between the two builders was not whether they <i>listened</i> to Jesus or not. The difference was what they did about it – the wise builder hears Jesus' words and puts them into practice (v47). The Bible speaks of a God of action, and He wants us to be a people of action.	
<b>Pray:</b> Is there an area of your life when your words don't match your action? Bring it to God and ask for His help.		<b>Pray:</b> For a renewing of courage and motivation to move to act in one area of your life where you want to see change.	
<b>Day 9: Criticising</b> Tuesday 9th December		<b>Day 10: Compassion</b> Wednesday 10th Dec	
<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute	<b>Read:</b> Mark 3.1-6	<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute	<b>Read:</b> Luke 13.10-17
<b>Reflect:</b> It is very easy to spend time criticising other people. Finding fault with Jesus had become far more important to the religious leaders of his day than any concern for people's suffering. And the religious gathering itself is paralysed by stubborn attitudes – unable to answer Jesus' simple question about helping someone.		<b>Reflect:</b> This woman was imprisoned by her condition and Jesus liberated her, setting her free even though it offended the religious leaders. The ordinary people knew this and they could see God at work through what Jesus was doing and celebrated. What boundaries do you need to cross to show compassion to someone in need?	
<b>Pray:</b> That you can resist the temptation to be critical and negative about other people today and be as positive as possible.		<b>Pray:</b> For someone you know who is struggling or suffering and for how you can show compassion to them	
<b>Day 11: Judgement</b> Thursday 11th December		<b>Day 12: Joy</b> Friday 12th December	
<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute	<b>Read:</b> Luke 6.37-42	<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute	<b>Read:</b> Luke 10.1-24
<b>Reflect:</b> How can we be passionate about the truth without seeming judgemental to those around us? Jesus is an incredible example. The truth He spoke was inseparable to the humility, love and compassion He lived out. He was clear to his followers: "do not judge" and "do not condemn".		<b>Reflect:</b> Jesus' sent his followers out to learn to do his work. They encountered challenges and successes. This did not bring a superficial cheerfulness but a deep joy. As Jesus says, they were truly blessed, because in following him they were witnesses to the turning point of history.	
<b>Pray:</b> For better understanding of a specific person, or group, that you feel judgemental toward		<b>Pray:</b> In this party season of superficial fun, pray for a deep renewing of joy in the life of someone you know	

<b>Day 13: Status</b> Saturday 13 <sup>th</sup> December	<b>Day 14: Service</b> Sunday 14 <sup>th</sup> December
<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 2 minutes   <b>Read:</b> Mark 10.35-45	<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 2 minutes   <b>Read:</b> John 13.1-17
<b>Reflect:</b> Celebrity culture is all around us today and it can be a real temptation to continually seek profile for what we do. It is reassuring that the gospels record that even those closest to Jesus were infected by a desire for recognition and self-promotion. But Jesus teaches often that aspiring to fame, fortune and profile is not His way. True greatness is found in serving other, not in status.	<b>Reflect:</b> This story shows that Jesus humbled himself to wash his disciples feet from being truly secure about who He was and where He was going (v3). We follow a God who humbled himself as a servant. Following Him means following His example (v14-15). True security in being loved by God frees us to be able to serve others.
<b>Pray:</b> For one area of your life in which you crave recognition. Pray that you will resist the temptations of self-promotion	<b>Pray:</b> For someone you know who serves others, that they may be encouraged and refreshed in their work.
<b>Day 15: Preference</b> Monday 15 <sup>th</sup> December	<b>Day 16: Purpose</b> Tuesday 16 <sup>th</sup> December
<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 2 minutes   <b>Read:</b> John 12.42-43	<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 2 minutes   <b>Read:</b> John 15.9-17
<b>Reflect:</b> Peer pressure is not just a challenge for younger people. It affects adults just as much. Here we see religious leaders who believe in Jesus but who don't want to risk being excluded from the community. Jesus' disciples had left all they had, but these people had a preference to follow the crowd.	<b>Reflect:</b> Jesus did not come simply to give us a ticket to heaven when we die. He chose people to 'bear fruit for His kingdom', to make a difference in this life. He calls us to work for the renewal of creation that God will one day finally complete. God wants people of purpose who will 'bear fruit that will last' (v16).
<b>Pray:</b> To resist pressure to conform to the expectations of others and instead to follow the more risky way of Jesus.	<b>Pray:</b> For the renewing of intention and purpose in an area of your life where you have lost direction.
<b>Day 17: Greed</b> Wednesday 17 <sup>th</sup> December	<b>Day 18: Generosity</b> Thursday 18 <sup>th</sup> December
<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute   <b>Read:</b> Luke 12.13-21	<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 1 minute   <b>Read:</b> Luke 12.13-21
<b>Reflect:</b> Jesus talks a lot about greed because how we use our possessions is a spiritual issue. Greed is corrosive to our true well-being because its desires can never be satisfied. Greed generates a need for more and more but our true worth is not measured in how much we own or control. We do find true life by storing things up for ourselves.	<b>Reflect:</b> Generosity is easy to talk about but hard to practice. Jesus teaches us though that each act of generosity towards those in need – whether through kindness, hospitality or friendship - creates a different kind of treasure than greed does. Generosity is not just important for helping the poor, it's vital for our own true well-being.
<b>Pray:</b> Take out your credit & bank cards. Pray that God will help you resist greed and help you use your resources well.	<b>Pray:</b> For one person you know who you could show generosity to today.
<b>Day 19: Consumerism</b> Friday 19 <sup>th</sup> December	<b>Day 20: Contentment</b> Saturday 20 <sup>th</sup> December
<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 3 minutes   <b>Read:</b> Luke 16.13-15	<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 3 minutes   <b>Read:</b> Luke 12.22-26
<b>Reflect:</b> In the UK consumerism has become the main religion and has made Christmas as its chief festival. The god of money has a tight hold on our society, causing discontentment and anxiety. How can we resist this consumerism and not be driven to spend more and more this Christmas?	<b>Reflect:</b> Real contentment does not come from what we wear or what we own, it comes from grasping our true value before God and being truly secure in that love. As Augustine put it so well: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."
<b>Pray:</b> For ways you can resist the power of consumerism this Christmas.	<b>Pray:</b> That within your church community or friendship group that you can help foster a culture of contentment rather than consumerism.
<b>Day 21: Sin</b> Sunday 21 <sup>st</sup> December	<b>Day 22: Salvation</b> Monday 22 <sup>nd</sup> December
<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 3 minutes   <b>Read:</b> Matthew 18.5-9	<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 3 minutes   <b>Read:</b> Luke 19.1-10
<b>Reflect:</b> Sin is not a popular word but it is all around us - both in individual acts of selfishness and in the mighty power of unjust institutions and regimes. God's hatred burns against the injustice that causes people to stumble and sin (see James 5.1-6). Jesus could not be clearer: we all need to repent and change our ways.	<b>Reflect:</b> As he entered the city of Jericho, Jesus chose the person who would have been perceived as the most entrenched in sinful behaviour. Zacchaeus was both a traitor and a blasphemer and he was immersed in corruption. Yet in his encounter with Jesus, he found salvation and transformation. In giving his life away, he truly found it.
<b>Pray:</b> That as a nation, the UK might resist perpetuating the sins of injustice and greed that scar our world.	<b>Pray:</b> For someone you know who needs to find salvation and transformation in Jesus.
<b>Day 23: Resistance</b> Tuesday 23 <sup>rd</sup> December	<b>Day 24: Renewal</b> Wednesday 24 <sup>th</sup> December
<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 3 minutes   <b>Read:</b> Matthew 24.4-14	<b>Be silent and still:</b> for 3 minutes   <b>Read:</b> Matthew 19.28-30
<b>Reflect:</b> Make no mistake, Jesus does not promise His followers an easy time: he says that they will face deception, war, disasters, persecution, treachery and death. But, despite all that, it is hope in Jesus that enables us to resist these challenges and stand firm, because in His death and resurrection there is new life.	<b>Reflect:</b> As we anticipate Christmas Day tomorrow, let's be assured that God <i>will</i> one day complete His work of renewing the earth. He will make all things new, and there will be no more pain or suffering (see Revelation 21:1-4). The true reality we glimpse in the Christmas story will be unveiled fully. This hope can bring us renewal today. Have a great Christmas!
<b>Pray:</b> That all followers of Jesus who are suffering persecution will stand firm in their trials and suffering and be renewed by hope this Christmas.	<b>Pray:</b> That this Christmas your friends and family will find deep renewal in God's love, truth and grace.